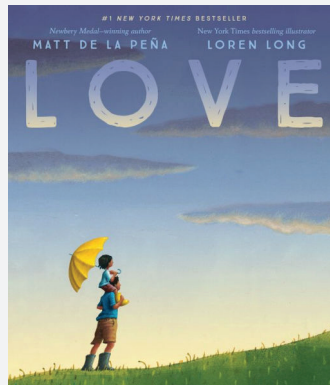


## Second Reaction: *Love as a Reminder of What We Have, Even in Troubling Times*

De La Peña, Matt. *Love*. Illustrated by Loren Long, G. P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2018.

*Sharon Daley*



Matt De La Peña's book, *Love*, brings us a message that is often missing today. He reminds readers that love is all around us and comes in many forms. De La Peña shows that love comes to us through all our senses, "A cabdriver plays love softly on his radio," "Love, too, is the smell of crashing waves," and "A slice of burned toast that tastes like love" (unpaged). In this tribute to love, we realize that love comes to us in many different forms, and those who love us and are loved by us come in many different forms, from the first-time parents at the end of the crib, to a mother embracing a child woken by a nightmare, to our own face looking back at us from the mirror.

In this touching book, De La Peña's descriptions and gentle reminders of love are paired with Loren Long's illustrations to show the many ways love is present, and sometimes absent, in daily life. In a time when many of us and our students are preoccupied with what is wrong in our lives and how our communities are hurting, some of us despair. *Love* allows us to remember the small things in life, for instance, how "... each night the sky above your trailer turns the color of love" and how these experiences connect us all (unpaged).

As a former elementary school teacher, I have witnessed the power of reading aloud to my second graders, so I have continued this practice in my work with pre-service teachers. My audience for the read-aloud of *Love* was a group of pre-service teachers in an advanced literacy methods course. Nearly all our class sessions begin with a read-aloud, and I find they

are just as beneficial for beginning conversations with my older “kids” as they were with my second graders. This discussion was no exception.

The pre-service teachers (PSTs) were moved by De La Peña’s words and Long’s illustrations. Many commented on the various representations of love, noting that this made the book relatable to a wide variety of students. One PST commented, “Love is exemplified in many ways, which shows that feelings can mean different things to different people.” Another made a similar observation by commenting, “everyday things are shown as love,” which allows readers to make “connections between life and love.” Finally, one PST observed that reading this book would enable “students to think about what the term/idea ‘love’ means to them and would make it easy for them to make personal connections.”

In addition to noticing the multiple representations of love, the pre-service teachers also pointed out that Long’s illustrations added depth to the representations by showing that, “Love doesn’t just look like a particular race or lifestyle.” According to one PST, “Love can be anything and anyone.” One of her colleagues mentioned that the book “can be understood by many people” because “minorities are represented, as well as people from different walks of life.” One even noted, “It could also be good to talk about diversity and how people experience love differently.”

After hearing the read-aloud and responding to the themes they noticed, the pre-service teachers also commented on how they might use this book with students of their own. Many pointed out De La Peña’s inclusion of the five senses as ways to recognize love: “And it’s love in the rustling leaves of gnarled trees lined behind the flower fields” (unpaged). Several of them thought this book would be a good tool when teaching young children about the five senses. Another PST reported she would focus on perspective-taking and empathy by asking her students, “Why do these things represent love to these people? What do they feel like when these instances of love happen?”

When considering the grade level in which they would read this book, the pre-service teachers mentioned ages ranging from K-8<sup>th</sup> grades, with one noting, “Really, any because even at 23 years old I enjoyed it!” Those who thought it was best suited to the primary grades commented it could be used to discuss empathy, gratefulness, and diversity. Those who thought it would work better in the upper grades mentioned using it to focus on metaphors and comparisons, to dig deeper into concepts of diversity through the illustrations, to introduce expressive writing, or even to springboard into poetry. Among those who thought it would be better for upper-grade students, one mentioned it could be read at transitional times in students’ lives, such as moving from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school.

As is evident in the reactions from the PSTs, De La Peña and Long present a necessary reprieve during troubling times by reassuring readers, young and old, that love is all around us in many forms. Readers of all ages will be reminded that if we look, smell, taste, and touch, love is there for us all.